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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 001269

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF AND AF/E; CENTCOM FOR POLAD JOHN HOLZMAN;
CENTCOM FORWARD FOR GENERAL ABIZAIID

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR GENERAL ABIZAIID'S VISIT TO DJIBOUTI

REF: DJIBOUTI 529

Classified By: Ambassador Marguerita D. Ragsdale.
For reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Combating poverty, improving the nation's health and education infrastructures and services and promoting economic development are top priorities for the Government of Djibouti. Embassy Djibouti and CJTF-HOA are working in tandem to assist in these areas. Economic ventures undertaken within the country must be seen within the context of the desire of the President of Djibouti to boost Djibouti's economy. Moreover, a major joint-venture port construction project with Emirates National Oil Company (ENOC) is being touted as an integral part of Djibouti's economic future. When the port comes on line in 2005, it will also support oil storage objectives of the U.S. Navy in the region under a contract with Defense Energy Support Center (DESC).

12. (C) Djibouti's attitude toward the U.S. remains favorably disposed. The U.S. military is in the process of negotiating extension of its lease and access at Camp Lemonier and President Guelleh has made known his desire to see the U.S. play a positive role in achieving security and stability in the Horn of Africa region. He is urging international community support of the Somali reconciliation process but also agreed recently to host a Somaliland interests, office in Djibouti. Foreign affairs agencies in Washington are re-examining core U.S. strategy for engagement in Somalia and Somaliland, but remain committed at this point to a unified Somalia. U.S.-Djibouti military and anti-terrorism cooperation remain strong and Djibouti continues to support our ongoing efforts at terrorist interdiction in the region. Djibouti is less than satisfied, however, with the pace of delivery of equipment promised or pledged under the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program and has voiced its concerns with the Ambassador, to which we have been responsive.

13. (C) On issues outside the region, President Guelleh has been quite vocal in expressing a deep disappointment with the lack of progress in ending the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. End summary.

Focus on Domestic Development Priorities

14. (C) The top domestic priorities for the Government of Djibouti are combating poverty, improving the nation's health and education infrastructures and services, and promoting economic development. Through USAID, the U.S. is assisting the Government of Djibouti implement a nation-wide education reform program at funding of USD 14 million over three years.

We are also assisting the Government of Djibouti to increase, at a funding level of USD 12 million over three years, equitable access to health care particularly of the poor, and the provision of quality and efficient health care to reduce infant, child and maternal mortality. We are joined in these efforts by the numerous small school and clinic rehabilitation and refurbishment projects undertaken successfully by the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) at Camp Lemonier.

15. (C) The U.S. is also assisting Djibouti increase opportunities for international sale of its livestock and is funding construction of a holding pen for livestock destined for the Arabian Peninsula to include veterinary inspection and export certification. Camp Lemonier has expressed concerns about the proximity of the pen to the Camp and is seeking clarification from USAID of the facility's environmental implications.

16. (C) President Guelleh is the driving force behind many economic ventures that the Djiboutian government hopes will boost the nation's economy. He is most proud of the port of Doraleh, and the economic potential he sees in this joint-venture construction project with Emirates National Oil Company (ENOC). Doraleh is being touted as an integral part of Djibouti's economic future. Once completed, it will have a Free Zone, an oil storage terminal facility, a container terminal, and a bulk terminal. The oil terminal facility will be the first to come on line, with a target completion date of May, 2005. Oil companies operating in Djibouti have already received notice of the requirement that they relocate

their operations to Doraleh where they will be obliged to lease oil storage tanks from ENOC. Four of the oil storage tanks have been reserved for exclusive use of the U.S. Navy under an open-tender Defense Energy Support Center (DESC) contract with ENOC.

17. (C) Djibouti is anxious to qualify in Fiscal Year 2005 for additional economic development assistance under the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003. The Act authorizes the provision of economic assistance to countries that enter into compacts with the U.S. to support internal policies and programs that advance the prospects of lasting economic growth and poverty reduction. Eligibility will depend on Djibouti's ability to demonstrate its commitment to just and democratic governance, economic freedom and investment in its people. Djibouti still has much work to do in these areas, but we are cooperating with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Government of Djibouti to provide the data needed for an earnest assessment.

Looking at the Horn of Africa Region and a U.S. Role

18. (C) President Guelleh expects a positive United States role in the achievement of security and stability in the Horn of Africa region and in the resolution of regional conflicts.

In his speech before the General Assembly of the United Nations on September 22, he highlighted the need for international support and assistance for regional peacekeeping efforts, as well as placing an emphasis on solving the problem of terrorism by getting at its root rather than reacting immediately with military force. In that address, he also detailed the problem of arms trafficking in Africa and the need to halt the diversion of Africa's resources away from its critical needs.

19. (C) President Guelleh is also urging the international community to provide assistance and support to the Somali reconciliation process. Djibouti, like the U.S, wishes to see a unified Somalia. Nevertheless, Guelleh agreed recently to host a Somaliland interests, office in Djibouti and Somaliland continues to press the U.S. and other nations for political recognition. U.S. foreign affairs agencies have begun a process of re-examining core U.S. strategy for counter-terrorism, political and economic engagement in Somalia and Somaliland, and our long-term policy with respect to both. U.S. Embassy Nairobi recently conducted a security assessment of Somaliland by sending three of its officers, including the Regional Security Officer (RSO) to Hargeisa.

Strong U.S.- Djibouti Military
and Anti-terrorism Cooperation

110. (C) The attitude of the Government of Djibouti and the general population continues to be favorably disposed towards the United States. U.S.- Djibouti military and anti-terrorism cooperation remain strong and Djibouti is supporting our ongoing efforts at terrorist interdiction. Training programs under the East Africa Counter-terrorism initiative (EACTI) have taken place with law enforcement, military, and intelligence personnel. Djibouti is less than satisfied, however, with the pace of delivery of equipment promised or pledged under FMF. General Fathi, Commander of the Djiboutian Armed Forces, has raised this issue with Ambassador and with USLO Chief. We have received clarification from the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) on the FMF process, and on delivery and have conveyed this information to General Fathi. General Fathi has also expressed to Ambassador, formally, his desire to see better coordination between the U.S. and Djibouti on use of local military firing ranges. CJTF-HOA Commander Helland has addressed this issue with General Fathi and is sending a follow-up letter.

111. (C) The U.S., under Department of Defense auspices, began on September 16 negotiations with Djibouti on renewal of the U.S. military's lease agreement for Camp Lemonier. Lead U.S. negotiator Theresa Whelan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Africa, has already provided Ambassador Olhaye in Washington with a draft agreement.

Concerns About the Middle East

112. (C) President Guelleh has not been very vocal publicly in either supporting or condemning the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan or in Iraq, perhaps out of deference to his country's hosting of the U.S. military. In a conversation with the Ambassador in April of this year, Guelleh cautioned that U.S. efforts to "shut down" Moqtada al-Sadr were having the opposite effect. Instead of earning the Shiite leader detractors, it was making him more popular. (see reftel)

113. (C) By contrast, Guelleh has been consistently vocal about his deep disappointment with a lack of progress in

ending the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Guelleh faults Israel for the impasse. In his recent speech before the United Nations, he expressed the view that the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is part of a three and a half decades-long process of blatant confiscation of Palestinian lands, farmlands and water resources. He criticized Israel's separation wall, which he stated makes an already explosive situation worse and creates irreversible facts on the ground. Israel's actions, in Guelleh's view, have made a mockery of the U.S. "Road Map" and rendered it worthless. In this same speech, he described the Palestinians as "struck with an indefinite deprivation, a sense of hopelessness and statelessness" and criticized the United Nations for its inability to constrain Israel.

RAGSDALE